

June 15, 2007

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-Napoleonville) today voted to approve sweeping legislation to protect America and invest in homeland security. The Homeland Security Appropriations bill was approved by a vote of 268-150. The legislation makes border security a top priority, provides additional border patrol agents for the country, provides first responders with additional training and equipment, improves aviation and port security, and includes strong accountability measures in order to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being well spent.

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**"Congress has a responsibility to help protect our communities from those who would do us harm,"** said Rep. Melancon. **"I am proud to support legislation that makes border security a top priority and gives the men and women who respond to emergencies the tools and resources they need. I am also pleased this bill increases funding for the Port Security Grant program, which has provided millions in federal grant money this year to ports in south Louisiana to improve security."**

As a member of the House-Senate conference committee that finalized the SAFE Ports Act last year, Rep. Melancon worked to ensure language was included in the final bill that

expanded the eligible criteria for the Port Security Grant Program to include energy ports like Port Fourchon and the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP) in south Louisiana. This year, ports in Rep. Melancon's congressional district received \$4.2 million in port security grants from the federal government, including \$1,182,527 for Port Fourchon, \$1,040,173 for the LOOP, \$975,000 for the Port of South Louisiana. The Port of Greater Baton Rouge, which extends into Ascension Parish in Rep. Melancon's congressional district, received a \$1,000,000 grant to improve security.

The 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations bill includes the following provisions:

### **Border Security**

- **Increased Funding for Border Protection.** The bill provides \$8.8 billion for the Customs and Border Protection agency, which is \$50 million above the President's request and \$647 million or 8 percent above FY 2007.

Rep. Melancon also voted in support of an amendment to increase the Customs and Border Protection fencing, infrastructure and technology account by \$89 million to provide greater protection along the U.S.-Mexico border and reduce illegal immigration. The amendment passed.

- **Additional Border Patrol Agents.** The bill provides funding for 3,000 additional Border Patrol agents in FY 2008 - which will bring the number of Border Patrol agents to 17,819 by the end of FY 2008.

- **Deportable Aliens.** The bill addresses a major immigration vulnerability that exists today. It requires that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency obtain information, on a monthly basis, from correctional facilities throughout the U.S. to identify incarcerated aliens who are subject to deportation. Every deportable alien should be identified and deported immediately upon their release from prison.

- **Secure Border Initiative.** The bill funds the Secure Border Initiative at the President's requested level of \$1 billion, while requiring the Department of Homeland Security to clearly justify how it plans to use these funds to achieve operational control of our borders. For each border segment, the Department will have to produce an analysis comparing its selected

approach to alternatives based on total cost, level of control achieved, impact on affected communities, and other factors.

### **Port Security & Transit Security**

- **Port Security Grants.** The bill provides \$400 million for port security grants, \$190 million over FY 2007 and the President's request, to protect critical port facilities and infrastructure, meeting the level authorized in the SAFE Ports Act. This is the largest single investment Congress has made to implement the security requirements of the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 (PL 107-295).

- **Transit Security Grants.** The bill provides \$400 million for transit security grants, \$225 million over FY 2007 and the President's request, to protect critical transit infrastructure, including rail and ferry systems, in high-threat areas.

### **First Responders**

- **State Homeland Security Grants.** State Homeland Security Grants are used to meet the needs of first responders, including hiring, training and equipping first responders. The President proposed slashing the grants by 52 percent. Instead, this bill restores this cut - providing \$550 million, which is \$25 million above FY 2007 and \$300 million above the President's request.

- **Local Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention (LLETP) program.** This \$375 million program plays a key role in assisting local law enforcement agencies in information sharing, target hardening, and counterterrorism planning. The President's budget eliminates this program. Instead, this bill provides \$400 million, which is \$25 million above FY 2007.

- **Firefighter Assistance Grants.** The President proposed slashing the grants by 55 percent. Instead, this bill restores this cut - providing \$570 million, which is \$23 million above FY 2007 and \$270 million above the President's request.

- **SAFER Grants.** The President proposed eliminating the \$115 million SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) program, which helps fund hiring and training of

additional firefighters. Instead, this bill provides \$230 million, which is \$115 million above FY 2007.

## Aviation Security

- **Explosive Detection Systems.** The 9/11 Commission recommended improving the explosive screening of checked baggage. This bill follows that recommendation, providing \$849 million for procurement, installation and maintenance of the latest explosive detection systems at airports -- \$325 million or 62 percent more than provided in the regular FY 2007 funding bill.

- **Screening of Air Cargo.** The 9/11 Commission also recommended increasing the amount of cargo screened on passenger aircraft. This bill provides funding to double the amount of cargo screened on passenger aircraft.

## Accountability Measures

- **Requiring Competitive Bidding of Contracts.** FEMA, a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), has been notorious for no-bid contracts. Indeed, FEMA recently submitted to Congress a list of nearly 4,000 contracts that were never competitively bid. This bill contains strong accountability measures to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are being well-spent and to eliminate no-bid contracts. The bill mandates that all grant and contract funds be awarded through full and competitive processes, except when funding distribution mechanisms are required by statute.

- **Requiring Major Improvements in Acquisition Oversight.** DHS has not proved to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars - experiencing ongoing cost, schedule, and performance problems with major acquisitions. The bill is designed to ensure that DHS invests acquisition dollars only in projects that are well-planned, competitively awarded, well-managed, and closely overseen. The bill mandates much stronger acquisition oversight and funds additional acquisition staff to conduct oversight.

## Other Key Provisions

- **Chemical Security.** The bill allows state and local governments to set chemical safety rules that are stronger than the federal government's.
  
- **Metropolitan Medical Response System.** The President had proposed eliminating the Metropolitan Medical Response System. Instead, the bill provides \$50 million, \$17 million over FY 2007, for the program, which provides funding for hospitals and EMS services in major metropolitan areas to enhance their preparedness.
  
- **Interoperable Communications Grants.** The bill provides \$50 million to continue a program funded by the Department of Commerce in FY 2007 to help local police, firefighters and emergency responders to talk to each other during a crisis.

The legislation approved by the House today also includes strong oversight provisions to ensure the careful spending of taxpayers' dollars by the Department of Homeland Security and eliminates wasteful no-bid contracts.

**"The American people expect their dollars to be spent on important efforts to secure our nation, not wasted on no-bid contracts,"** added Rep. Melancon. **"This bill includes tough new accountability measures to ensure we protect our communities and spend taxpayers' dollars the right way."**

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